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## Information, Intelligence and Negotiation: The Atlantic European Diplomatic World, 1558-1585

**Principal Investigators:** Denice Fett

In a September 1561 dispatch sent from Madrid to English Secretary of State Sir William Cecil, ambassador Sir Thomas Chaloner noted that he had remained so long without letters or contact from England that he could not fulfill his duties as an ambassador to Spain.

Chaloner could not effectively negotiate with King Phillip II of Spain about English policy decisions, trade strategies, or positions on foreign affairs, simply because he lacked the necessary information. His predicament reflects the importance of reliable communications networks to develop, transmit, and implement foreign policy initiatives.

Denice Fett examines the development of a diplomatic communications system that depended on gathering and transmitting information and intelligence during the late 16th century. While some scholars have explored international diplomacy from the perspective of a single nation, Fett's dissertation draws from archival sources in five different countries and five different languages.

She focuses on the 27-year span between France and Spain's plan to conquer England in 1558 and the commencement of an undeclared war between England and Spain in 1585. By studying the surviving diplomatic archives of English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Scottish governments, Fett examines the logistics of diplomacy including the creation of policy, communication through ambassadors, and use of force to support policy goals.

Funding from the Mershon Center allowed Fett to continue archival research at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, British National Archives in Kew, Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, and Professor De Lamar Jensen's private



Denice Fett

Department of History  
The Ohio State University

microfilm collection in Provo, Utah.

Part of Fett's work involved reconstructing the stories of people involved in the transmission of diplomatic information. She found that by studying these people's lives, she was able to understand the workings of the larger diplomatic system.

Fett studied colorful tales of interactions between people from all levels of society – from kings and queens, to servants, secretaries, couriers and assassins. Although the stories she uncovered are interesting in their own right, when placed in conversation with one another, they reveal the processes by which actors negotiated with one another on a personal, political, diplomatic and state level.

As she recreated the networks through which people acquired information, Fett studied the variety of ways political and diplomatic intelligence was transmitted. Methods ranged from sending couriers in disguise, avoiding risks of sabotage and even death, to relaying ciphered correspondence through clandestine networks. In order to develop relevant and viable policy initiatives, diplomats reached for creative solutions to secure the means of communicating intelligence gathered abroad to the home government.

Fett continues in her endeavor to recreate the lives and tales of people involved in the communication of international relation information more than 400 years ago. She uses the stories of historical figures to show that the world of early modern negotiation, including the processes of information acquisition, dissemination and utilization, was dominated by those involved in every step of the communication process.

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1501 Neil Ave.

Columbus, OH 43201

Phone: 614.292.1681

Fax: 614.292.2407

Email: [mershoncenter@osu.edu](mailto:mershoncenter@osu.edu)